

BY THE WAY

'Dialogue' Might Lead to 'Crunch'

BY BILL HENRY

WASHINGTON—A rather realistic, but observant, Republican remarked the other day that while the New Frontier didn't seem to be very successful in solving any of the nation's problems it was remarkably clever at finding language with which to describe them. This year's two new set words are "dialogue" and "crunch." If you are using these words, well, you just don't belong! Example—"We have been engaged in a strenuous dialogue with Khrushchev but it seems certain that before the end of the year there will be crunch in Berlin." The word "dialogue" is, by this time, just a little weatherbeaten—it even cropped up in a quotation from Gov. Pat Brown the other day—but "crunch" is comparatively recent. It is not used exclusively to describe something physical, such as the rather obvious White House feeling that the Berlin situation may develop into an armed clash of some sort. It is used to describe any sort of crisis. For instance, when a high State Department expert on the Far East was asked what might happen if the current deadline in Laos disclosed that we have withdrawn our troops as promised but the Reds have not anticipated that they would. "Well," he said, with a faraway look in his eyes, "it might come to a crunch down there, I suppose." Knowledgeable Washington observers are inclined to think that the Laos crunch is something that we don't intend to do anything about—we've kissed that area good-by—but there is every indication that the White House takes the Berlin crunch very seriously indeed.

How Our Intelligence Sees It

The two major current mysteries around here are (1) the nature of the Berlin crunch, and (2) whose money is lawyer Donovan going to use in ransoming those Cubans? You can't get an honest answer to either of these questions. Most people think the White House doesn't know the answer to the first and doesn't want to be embarrassed by having to answer the second. The current belief is that our intelligence experts interpret the Berlin situation as follows: (a) Khrushchev has talked himself far out on a limb and has to do something; (b) his probable move will be to go one step farther in turning the Berlin situation over to the East Germans; (c) the East Germans will attempt to eliminate Berlin's four-power status by interrupting travel from West Germany; (d) the West's only possible answer to this will be to force its way through; (e) there are complications making use of NATO troops impractical, so we are engaged, behind the scenes, in trying to persuade Chancellor Adenauer to assign some new West German troops to help the rather small four-power West Berlin force in its effort to keep the communications open.

Developments May Be Serious

It doesn't make much difference what you call this—it has ominous possibilities. It is already clear that the West Germans are not anxious to start a war against the East Germans. The expectation that Khrushchev will seek a meeting with Mr. Kennedy next month is based on his belief that, particularly in view of our weakness shown when the wall was erected, we will be unable to pull ourselves together and face up to a real showdown. He hopes to force another Soviet-style compromise—we give up and he gets what he wants. He hopes the Castro-Cuban situation will help rattle us. The atmosphere in Washington right now is not as wobbly as Khrushchev may think. The Congress-passed resolution backing the President to the limit was designed to serve warning of our determination. As of now, it looks like a showdown—a crunch that might be very serious indeed.